

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1087

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (LINE OMMISION PARA 5)

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: PFOR, CE, IN

SUBJ: CEYLONSE REACTION TO INDIAN NUCLEAR EXPLOSION

REF: COLOMBO 1407, COLOMBO 1393

1. SUMMARY: IN FIRST PUBLIC STATEMENT ON INDIAN NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, SENIOR OFFICIAL HAS SAID GSL ACCEPTS INDIAN ASSURANCES THAT EXPLOSION IS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES ONLY. PRESS PLAY ON EXPLOSION HAS BEEN HEAVY BUT MAINLY BASED ON FOREIGN REACTION. LOCAL REACTION HAS BEEN RELATIVELY MUTED AND IS LARGELY SPLIT BETWEEN TAMILS WHO WELCOME INDIAN ACTION AND OTHERS WHO FIND FAULT OR CONDEMN IT. GSL WILL PROBABLY NOT PUBLICLY CRITICIZE INDIAN ACTION. END SUMMARY.

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2. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MDFA)
DEPUTY MINISTER LAKSHMAN JAYAKODY MADE FIRST PUBLIC
GSL STATEMENT "ON BEHALF OF PRIME MINISTER" REGARDING
INDIAN NUCLEAR EXPLOSION IN REPLY TO QUESTION OF
MUSLIM MP IN NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY JUNE 6. JAYAKODY
NOTED THAT GOI HAD DESCRIBED EVENT AS TEST, NOT BOMB
AS STATED BY MP. HE THEN SAID GSL ACCEPTS PRIME
MINISTER GANDHI'S STATEMENT THAT IT WAS TEST FOR
ADVANCEMENT OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY AND PEACEFUL USES
OF ATOMIC ENERGY.

3. ON DAY EARLIER, GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED "CEYLON
DAILY NEWS", IN EDITORIAL IN CONNECTION WITH VISIT
BY INDIAN DELEGATION TO DISCUSS ECONOMIC COOPERATION,
WAS "HEARTENED" THAT NUCLEAR TEST HAD NOT AFFECTED
DESIRE OF INDIA AND SRI LANKA FOR CLOSER ECONOMIC
COOPERATION. IN SOMEWHAT PETULANT MANNER, EDITORIAL

CONTINUED: "INDEED WHEN THE EUPHORIC CELEBRATIONS
OVER THIS TECHNOLOGICAL FEAT AND NEWLY ACQUIRED NUCLEAR
MUSCLE ARE OVER AND INDIAN PRESS, SO INCURABLY FOND
OF LECTURING US ON OUR PRIORITIES TURNS TO THEIR,
INDIAN PUBLIC OPINION WILL BE FOCUSED ONCE AGAIN ON
NATION'S PRIMARY TASK: THE BATTLE AGAINST POVERTY".
EDITORIAL ENDS WITH APPEAL TO BUREAUCRATS TO STOP
DILLY-DALLYING AND BROADEN SCOPE OF TWO NATIONS'
ECONOMIC COOPERATION.

4. SINCE EXPLOSION, PRESS HERE HAS BEEN FILLED WITH
STORIES AND COLUMNS REPORTING MAINLY REACTIONS OF OR
COMMENTS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES AND NEWSPAPERS. THERE
HAVE ALSO BEEN PROMINENT ARTICLES PLACED BY INDIANS
GIVING THEIR SIDE OF STORY. LOCAL REACTION HAS
BEEN SPLIT, WITH TAMIL GROUPS AND NEWSPAPERS, INCLUDING
TAMIL UNITED FRONT, APPROVING INDIAN ACTION, WHILE
ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS SRI LANKA-PAKISTAN FRIENDSHIP
SOCIETY PREDICTABLY CONDEMN EXPLOSION. MOST HOSTILE
PRESS REACTION TO DATE HAS COME IN "JANAVEGAYA", LEFT-
WING WEEKLY CONSIDERED PRO-PEKING, EDITED BY PRIME
MINISTER'S SON-IN-LAW. THIS PAPER SAID EXPLOSION IS
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THREAT TO WORLD PEACE AND TO SRI LANKA, CONJURING UP
"PROPOSED" NAVAL BASE ON KACHCHATIVU ISLAND AS
"DAGGER HANGING OVER US", AND TOOK INDIA TO TASK FOR
SPENDING LARGE SUMS ON NUCLEAR RESEARCH WHILE ITS
PEOPLE ARE STARVING.

5. COMMENT: INDIANS HERE HAVE STRESSED PEACEFUL
PURPOSES OF EXPLOSION AND IT APPEARS GSL WILL NOT

CRITICIZE INDIA PUBLICLY. HOWEVER, MOST CEYLONESE,
OTHER THAN TAMILS, ARE NOT HAPPY WITH INDIAN ACTION,
WHICH IS LIKELY TO REINFORCE THEIR EXISTING FEARS
AND APPREHENSIONS THAT INDIA PLANS TO DOMINATE OR
CONTROL SRI LANKA.
VAN HOLLEN

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